Summary of Evidence on C.I. Scofield's Doctor of Divinity Degree

The evidence regarding C.I. Scofield's Doctor of Divinity (D.D.) degree reveals significant ambiguity and ongoing scholarly debate.

Educational Background

Scofield never attended seminary or any theological college. He had no formal theological training or higher education credentials. His only documented education was in law, which he studied in St. Louis, and his subsequent work as an attorney and Kansas legislator.[1] [2] [3] [4]

The D.D. Degree Claim

Beginning around 1892, Scofield began styling himself as "Rev. C.I. Scofield, D.D.". By 1897, the Northfield Bible Conference program listed his name with the D.D. designation. The 1909 Scofield Reference Bible was published with him listed as "Rev. C.I. Scofield, D.D.".[2] [5] [6] [7] [8] [1]

Lack of Documentary Evidence

No extant records exist of any academic institution—seminary, college, or university—having conferred either an earned or honorary Doctor of Divinity degree upon Scofield. D. Jean Rushing's 2011 master's thesis from East Tennessee State University, which extensively examined Scofield's life, acknowledged the possibility that "an academic institution awarded an honorary D.D. degree to Scofield and perhaps any such records are no longer extant". However, this remains speculative rather than documented.[9] [10] [11] [1] [2]

Multiple sources note that if Scofield had obtained a D.D. from a reputable institution, that seminary would likely have used him as "a bragging right" given his later fame. The absence of any institution claiming him as an alumnus is considered telling.[1]

Alternative Account: "Someone Pinned It On Him"

One potentially significant piece of evidence comes from William L. Pettingill, a colleague who co-founded the Philadelphia School of the Bible with Scofield in 1914. According to a 2024 blog post citing Pettingill's article "When Scofield Gave Counsel" published in *The Sunday School Times* in September 1921 (shortly after Scofield's death), Pettingill claimed that Scofield did not bestow the title on himself but that "someone else did". Pettingill reportedly quoted Scofield as saying with humor, "I've been *indoctrinated*". However, the specific details of who conferred the degree and when remain unclear even in this account.[12] [13] [14]

Critical Assessments

Joseph M. Canfield's 1988 biography *The Incredible Scofield and His Book* cast doubt on Scofield's academic credentials, suggesting the degree was self-bestowed. Multiple scholarly sources describe Scofield as having "fraudulently claimed in 1892 to be a Doctor of Divinity" despite not having even a bachelor's degree.[15] [16] [9]

Historian Donald Harman Akenson noted in his 2023 work *The Americanization of the Apocalypse* that Scofield "acquired a D.D. degree from an institution that never was named".[7]

Conclusion

The preponderance of evidence indicates that Scofield's D.D. was not a legitimate earned doctoral degree from any accredited institution. No seminary or university has ever been documented as granting him this credential, either as an earned degree or as a formal honorary doctorate. While some defenders suggest he may have received an informal honorary designation from colleagues or at a Bible conference, no institutional records support even this claim. The most charitable interpretation—that records of a legitimate honorary degree were lost—remains unsubstantiated speculation.

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